FLOOR NOZZLE FOR A VACUUM CLEANER

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to vacuum cleaners. More particularly, the present invention relates to a new floor nozzle for a vacuum cleaner. Even more particularly, the invention relates to a floor nozzle with separate heads that rotate.

Description of Related Art

Stick vacuum cleaners are known in the art. These vacuum cleaners are typically more lightweight than traditional upright cleaners and lack the driven brush rolls of traditional upright cleaners. The lighter weight and lack of a driven brush roll allows these cleaners to be more easily manipulated by a user on different surfaces and/or a wider variety of surfaces than traditional upright cleaners.

For example, stick vacuum cleaners are often used on non-carpeted floor surfaces where a driven brush roll may damage the floor surface. A stick vacuum cleaner is also often used for surfaces with hard-to-reach areas or elevated surfaces. The lighter weight and more compact design of a stick vacuum compared to a traditional upright vacuum leads to greater maneuverability and ease of lifting.

Stick vacuum cleaners typically operate by drawing in dirt-laden air via suction that is created by a motor driving a fan or impeller. The dirt-laden air is drawn into the unit through a nozzle and passes through a dirt collection device such as a cup. After the air passes through the dirt collection device it is typically drawn through a filter. Examples of these types of cleaners are provided in U.S. Patent No. 6,146,434 issued to Scalfani et al. (the '434 patent) and U.S. Patent No. 5,107,567 to Ferrari et al. (the '567 patent).

Prior art versions of stick-type vacuum cleaners have several disadvantages. One of these disadvantages is a lack of adequate suction effective for removing dirt from the floor surface. Also, there is inadequate removal of dirt from the air stream, resulting from dirt having to fall against at least part of the force of the air flow, as air is pulled generally upward through the dirt collection unit. This lack of effective cleaning air flow reduces the ability of the stick-type vacuum cleaner to remove dirt and dust from the dirt-laden air.

Another disadvantage of the prior art stick vacuums is the difficulty in removing the dirt collection device. The design of these vacuums does not allow for easy, clean removal of the device. The inventions of the prior art, such as the vacuum shown in the '434 patent, result in difficult or awkward removal of the dirt collection unit, creating extra effort and jarring motions by the user which spill the dirt collected by the vacuum when the dirt collection device is emptied.

Yet another disadvantage of the prior art cleaners, as exemplified by the inventions disclosed in the '434 and '567 patents, is a wide floor nozzle. Such wide nozzles allow an open surface area to be cleaned rapidly, but when a user attempts to clean a floor surface that is confined, such as a corner space or an area near a large object, the large nozzles cannot be manipulated to thoroughly clean the surface. This prevents the floor nozzle from effectively cleaning the confined area and forces the user to use an aptly-named crevice tool instead.

Accordingly, it is desirable to develop a new stick vacuum cleaner which would overcome the foregoing difficulties and others by providing improved air flow, better mounting of the dirt collection device and a floor nozzle which can clean confined areas easily yet still clean large open areas rapidly.

Summary of the Invention

In an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, a floor nozzle for a vacuum cleaner is provided. The floor nozzle includes a central housing. A left nozzle head is movably secured to the central housing. A right nozzle head is movably secured to the central housing, wherein a portion of the left nozzle head and a portion of the right nozzle head extend into the central housing and move around a vertical axis passing through the central housing.

In another exemplary embodiment of the present invention, a floor nozzle for a vacuum cleaner is provided. The floor nozzle includes a central housing. A left nozzle head is rotatably secured to the central housing and a right nozzle head is rotatably secured to the central housing. A dirt path extends through the central housing and communicates with the left and right nozzle heads. A biasing member urges the left and right nozzle heads into one end position in relation to the central housing.

In yet another exemplary embodiment of the present invention, a floor nozzle for a vacuum cleaner is provided. The floor nozzle includes a base plate and a top cover that is connected to the base plate. A left nozzle head includes at least one central dirt path ring, wherein the at least one left nozzle central dirt path ring is rotatably secured between the base plate and the top cover. A right nozzle head includes at least one central dirt path ring, wherein the at least one right nozzle central dirt path ring is rotatably secured between the base plate and the top cover. The at least one left nozzle central dirt path ring and the at least one right nozzle central dirt path ring are vertically aligned and define a central dirt path.

In still another exemplary embodiment of the present invention, a vacuum

cleaner is provided. The vacuum cleaner includes a nozzle head that has a first section and a second section. The second section is pivotable around a vertical axis in relation to the first section. A housing is connected to the nozzle head and the housing defines at least one chamber and at least one cavity. A motor assembly is disposed in the at least one chamber and a filter assembly is disposed in the at least one cavity.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention may take form in certain components and structures, a preferred embodiment of which will be illustrated in the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a front elevational view of a portion of a stick vacuum cleaner in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an enlarged bottom perspective view of a floor nozzle of the vacuum cleaner of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is an enlarged perspective view of a housing and a dirt cup of the vacuum cleaner of FIG. 1;

FIG. 4 is an exploded perspective view of the vacuum cleaner of FIG. 1;

FIG. 5 is an enlarged perspective view of the dirt cup of the vacuum cleaner of FIG. 4 with a portion cut away;

FIG. 6 is a side cross-sectional view of the vacuum cleaner of FIG. 1;

FIG. 7 is an enlarged side cross-sectional view of the upper portion of the vacuum cleaner of FIG. 5;

FIG. 8 is a side elevational view of the vacuum cleaner of FIG. 1 with the dirt

cup in an emptying position;

FIG. 9 is an enlarged perspective view of a portion of the vacuum cleaner of FIG. 3;

FIG. 10 is a side elevational view of an above-the-floor cleaning hose arrangement for the vacuum cleaner of FIG. 1;

FIG. 11 is an enlarged perspective view of a portion of the vacuum cleaner of FIG. 1 with the above-the-floor cleaning hose in a use position;

FIG. 12 is an exploded bottom perspective view of the floor nozzle of FIG. 1;

FIG. 13 is a bottom plan view of the floor nozzle of FIG. 1 in a fully extended position with a base plate removed; and

FIG. 14 is a bottom plan view of the floor nozzle of FIG. 1 in a fully retracted position with the base plate removed.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

Referring now to the drawings, wherein the showings are for purposes of illustrating a preferred embodiment of the invention only and not for purposes of limiting the same, FIG. 1 shows an upright stick vacuum cleaner **10** in accordance with the present invention. While a stick vacuum cleaner is shown, the invention could also be used on other types of upright vacuum cleaners. The stick vacuum cleaner **10** comprises a floor nozzle **12**, a main handle **14**, and a housing **16**, including a dirt cup assembly **18**, which extends between the floor nozzle **12** and the main handle **14**. A first portion or first end **20** of the housing **16** is pivotally connected to the floor nozzle **12** and a second portion or second end **22** of the housing **16** is connected to the main handle **14**.

A latch actuator **24** is included on the dirt cup assembly **18** and a power switch **26** is mounted on the upper portion **22** of the housing **16**. In addition, the housing **16** has a front panel **28** which defines exhaust vents **30**.

With reference now to FIG. 2, the floor nozzle **12** includes rear wheels **32** and relatively small front wheels **34** which cooperate to provide mobility along the surface to be cleaned by the vacuum cleaner **10**. A bumper **36** protects the floor nozzle **12** as well as objects with which the floor nozzle **12** may come into contact. The floor nozzle **12** defines at least one suction channel **38** which leads to at least one suction inlet **40**. The suction inlet **40** and the suction channel **38** cooperate to provide an intake area for dirt-laden air. At least one bristle strip **42** is located adjacent the suction channel **38** to assist in the gathering of dirt particles and the deflection of dirt-laden air into the suction channel **38** and the suction inlet **40**. Instead of bristles, the strip **42** may be of soft yet strong material, such as felt, to prevent damage to delicate floor surfaces. A pivot tube **44** is in fluid connection with the suction nozzle **40** to convey dirt-laden air through the floor nozzle **12**. Other features of the floor nozzle **12** will be described in detail below.

With reference to FIG. 3, a lower hose **46** is in fluid communication with the pivot tube **44** of the floor nozzle **12** (referring back to FIG. 2), whereby dirt-laden air is drawn into the housing **16**. A hose connector **47** facilitates a pivot connection between the housing **16** and the floor nozzle **12**. The floor nozzle **12** can be selectively separated from the housing **16** when the pivot tube **44** is removed from the hose connector **47**. A housing conduit **48** is in fluid connection with the lower hose **46** and conveys dirt-laden air to the dirt cup **18**. The dirt cup **18** includes a handle **50** that is utilized for both the removal of the dirt cup **18** from the housing **16**,

to be described below, and the lifting of the entire vacuum **10** when the dirt cup **18** is in a closed, use position to clean elevated or hard-to-reach surfaces with the floor nozzle **12** and to easily transport the cleaner **10**. Located behind the front panel **28** of the housing **16** is a rear panel **52**.

Turning now to FIG. 4, the housing **16** defines a housing cavity or first cavity **54**, which at least partially receives the dirt cup assembly **18**. This is facilitated by a first aperture **56** defined in the front panel **28** of the housing **16** and a second aperture **58** (see also FIG. 6) defined in the rear panel **52** of the housing **16**. In the illustrated embodiment, the second aperture **58** is smaller in surface area than the first aperture **56**.

The dirt cup **18** includes a front wall **60** which has a first side edge **62** and a second side edge **64**. The front wall **60** of the dirt cup **18** also includes an inlet duct **66**. A conversion port **67** for above-the-floor cleaning is defined in the inlet duct **66** of the dirt cup **18** and will be described in greater detail below. A first side wall **68** of the dirt cup **18** has a proximal edge **70** and a distal edge **72**. A second side wall **74** of the dirt cup **18** also includes a proximal edge (not visible) and a distal edge **78**. The first **68** and second **74** side walls extend opposite and generally parallel to one another. The proximal edge **70** of the first side wall **68** and the proximal edge of the second side wall **74** are connected to the front wall **60** of the dirt cup **18**. The proximal edge **70** of the first side wall **68** is near the first side edge **62** of the front wall **60** and the proximal edge of the second side wall **74** is near the second side edge **64** of the front wall **60**. However, the first side edge **62** of the front wall **60** extends past the proximal edge **70** of the first side wall **68** and the second side edge **64** of the front wall extends past the proximal edge of the second side wall **74**,

forming wings.

The distal edge **72** of the first side wall **70** and the distal edge **78** of the second side wall **74** each connect to a rear wall **80** of the dirt cup **18**. The rear wall **80** extends opposite and generally parallel to the front wall **60** and includes a contoured portion **81**. Connected near the bottom of the front wall **60** and at the bottom of the first side wall **68**, the second side wall **74** and the rear wall **80** of the dirt cup **18** is a base wall **82**. The front wall **60**, first side wall **68**, second side wall **74**, rear wall **80** and base wall **82** form a dirt cup cavity **84**, a second cavity that functions as a cyclonic chamber. With reference now to FIG. 6, the base wall **82** defines an orifice that is an exhaust duct or port **86** which aligns with an orifice **88** defined in the housing **16**.

When the dirt cup **18** is engaged in the housing **16** for use of the vacuum cleaner, the first side wall **68**, second side wall **74**, rear wall **80** and base wall **82** pass through the first aperture **56** and are received in the housing cavity **54**. As shown in FIG. 7, the contoured portion **81** of the rear wall **80** of the dirt cup **18** is received by and cooperates with the second aperture **58** to provide alignment and an additional mechanical seat for the dirt cup **18** in a use position. The front wall **60** of the dirt cup **18** forms an exterior front wall, at least a portion of which remains substantially flush with the front panel **28** of the housing **16** when the dirt cup **18** is in a use position. This design facilitates easy removal of the dirt cup **18** for emptying as will be described in greater detail below.

With continuing reference to FIG. 4, a filter assembly **90** is shown in a removed position from the dirt cup **18**. The filter assembly **90** includes a filter cage **92** upon which a filter medium **94** is mounted. In this embodiment, the filter medium

94 is made of a pleated plastic material that is known in the art. One type of filter medium **94** comprises polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), a polymeric, plastic material commonly referred to by the registered trademark TEFLON®. The low coefficient of friction of a filter medium comprising PTFE facilitates cleaning of the filter element by washing. The pleated filter medium **94** can be defined substantially or entirely from GORE-TEX®, a PTFE-based material commercially available from W.L. GORE & ASSOCIATES, Elkton, Maryland 21921. The GORE-TEX® filter medium, also sold under the trademark CLEANSTREAM® by W.L. GORE & ASSOCIATES, is an expanded PTFE membrane defined from billions of continuous, tiny fibrils. The filter blocks the passage of at least 99% of particles 0.3μm in size or larger. Although not visible in the drawings, the inwardly and/or outwardly facing surface of the CLEANSTREAM® filter medium **94** can be coated with a mesh backing material of plastic or the like for durability since it enhances the abrasion-resistance characteristics of the plastic filter material. The mesh may also enhance the strength of the plastic filter material somewhat.

The cage **92** includes a proximal end **96** and a distal end **98**. A top wall **100** is connected to the proximal end **96** of the cage **92** and a filter top gasket **101** is disposed about the periphery of the upper surface of the top wall **100**. The top gasket **101** functions to seal the dirt cup cavity **84**, as will be described in greater detail below. A filter handle **102** is mounted on the upper surface of the top wall **100** to allow a user to easily grasp the filter assembly **90** for removal from the dirt cup **18** for cleaning or replacement. Connected to the distal end **98** of the filter cage **92** is a bottom support **104**.

Turning now to FIG. 5, the filter assembly **90** is concentrically positioned

within the dirt cup cavity **84**, facilitated by the bottom support **104** of the filter assembly **90** releasably engaging a filter support tube or element **106**. The support tube **106** includes a base **108** that surrounds the orifice **86** defined in the base wall **82** of the dirt cup **18**. The support tube **106** may be integrally molded to the base wall **82** of the dirt cup **18** or it may be an independent component that is connected to the base wall **82** by fasteners, molded lips, a snap fit, an interference fit or other means known to those skilled in the art. The support tube **106** also includes a neck **110** upon which a sealing element or member **112**, such as a gasket or an o-ring, is mounted. The sealing element **112** is retained between an upper shoulder **114** and a lower shoulder **116** extending from the neck **110** of the support tube **106**. The sealing element **112** may alternatively be located on the inner diameter of the bottom support **112**. Thus, when the filter assembly **90** is inserted into the dirt cup cavity **84**, the bottom support **104** of the filter assembly **90** slides over the support tube **106** to provide a releasable connection that is sealed by the sealing element **112**. This connection also provides axial alignment of the filter assembly **90** and the exhaust duct **86**.

The support tube **106** includes an opening **118** which allows air passing through the filter medium **94** and through the filter cage **92** to be drawn through the support tube **106** and out of the dirt cup **18**. Located within the opening **118** is a support member **119**. Because the bottom support **104** of the filter assembly **90** may flex when it is in contact with the base **108** of the support tube **106**, the support member **119** cooperates with the wall of the support tube **106** to provide support for the distal end **98** of the filter cage **92** and prevent excessive movement of the filter assembly **90** in a downward direction.

With reference to FIG. 6, When the vacuum cleaner **10** is in use, the air follows a short and efficient flow path as represented by the arrows. Dirt-laden air is drawn in through the suction inlet **40** in the floor nozzle **12** and moves up through the floor nozzle **12**, through the pivot tube **44** and into the lower hose **46**. The dirt-laden air is then drawn through the housing conduit **48** and into the inlet duct **66** of the dirt cup **18**. A support seal **122** provides an effective seal between the housing conduit **48** and the inlet duct **66** of the dirt cup **18**. The dirt-laden air is then drawn to an upper portion of the dirt cup **18** and enters the dirt cup cavity **84**, tangentially so that the cavity forms a cyclonic air chamber. At this point, heavier dirt particles are flung outwardly by centrifugal action and fall to the base wall **82** of the dirt cup **18** by gravity. Lighter particles are drawn to the filter medium **94** as the air is pulled to the interior of the filter assembly **90**. The filter medium **94** traps smaller dirt particles that have not fallen to the base of the dirt cup **18**.

Substantially clean air is thus drawn into the interior of the filter assembly **90** and passes through the opening **118** of the filter support tube **106**. The air passes through a secondary filter **123** that is supported by a grill **124** and is surrounded by a seal **125**, ensuring that clean air enters a fan **126** in case there is a gap or break in the filter material **94**. When the dirt cup **18** is in a removed or cleaning position, a user has easy access to the secondary filter **123** for cleaning or replacement by reaching into the housing cavity **54** (referring back to FIG. 4).

Once the air passes through the secondary filter **123** it enters the fan **126** through a fan inlet **128**. Clean air is then blown into the motor chamber **130**, across the motor assembly **132** and out through the vents **30** defined in the housing **16**. The filter assembly **90**, the exhaust duct **86** of the dirt cup **18**, the fan inlet **128,** the

fan **126** and the motor assembly **132** can be aligned along a longitudinal axis to promote efficient air flow.

As is evident from FIG. 6, a deflector **133** is located on the front wall **60** of the dirt cup **18** at a point where the inlet duct **66** opens into the cyclonic chamber **84**. The deflector **133** helps to create a generally spiraling flow direction in the cyclonic chamber **84**, with gravity urging dirt particles to fall to the base of the dirt cup **18**. The downward airflow, since the outlet of the dirt cup is located on the base wall **82**, is with the force of gravity instead of against it, encouraging particles to fall to the base of the dirt cup **18** and enhancing the ability of the vacuum **10** to remove dirt from the air stream. It is important to note that the deflector **133** may be a member that can be located on many alternative surfaces to create a tangential inlet to the cyclonic chamber **84**. While the deflector **133** is shown on the front wall **60** of the dirt cup **18** in FIG. 6, it may be located, for example, on the rear wall **80** of the dirt cup **84** (as shown in hidden form in FIG. 7), or on the top wall **100** of the filter assembly **90**.

Turning now to FIG. 7, a latch assembly **134** facilitates the removable connection of the dirt cup **18** to the housing **16**. The latch assembly **134** includes a latch arm **136** having an enlarged distal end **138**. The distal end **138** includes a contact face **140** which engages a shoulder **142** of the housing **16** when the dirt cup **18** is in a closed, use position.

When the dirt cup **18** is to be removed for cleaning, the user presses the latch actuator **24**, causing the latch arm **136** to rotate upward. The contact face **140** of the distal end **138** moves to a point above the shoulder **142**, allowing the dirt cup **18** to be removed. A spring **144** urges the contact face **140** against the shoulder **142** until the user presses the latch actuator **24** and causes the latch arm **136** to rotate.

Also shown in FIG. 7 is a labyrinth seal created between the filter assembly **90** and at least a portion of the dirt cup **18**. The front wall **60** of the dirt cup **18** includes an upper portion **146** having a projection **148**. The top wall **100** of the filter assembly **90** includes the filter top gasket **101** which extends away from the upper surface of the top wall **100**. The top wall **100** also includes a skirt **150** that extends away from a lower surface of the top wall **100** in a manner offset from the top gasket **101**. When the filter assembly **90** is seated in a use position within the dirt cup cavity **84**, the top gasket **101** and skirt **150** of the top wall **100** cooperate with the projection **148** to form a labyrinth seal. The labyrinth seal provides an improved seal of the dirt-containing portion of the stick vacuum **10**, i.e., the dirt cup cavity **84**. This results in less dirt escaping from the vacuum cleaner **10**.

FIG. 7 also illustrates the interaction between the rear wall **80** of the dirt cup **18** and the rear panel **52** of the housing **16**. As mentioned above, the contoured portion **81** of the rear wall **80** of the dirt cup **18** is received by the second aperture **58**, allowing the dirt cup **18** to firmly seat in the housing **16**. In a use position, the rear wall **80** of the dirt cup **18** forms at least a portion of the exterior wall of the rear panel **52** of the housing **16**.

With reference to FIG. 8, the dirt cup **18** is removed from the housing **16** by pressing on the latch actuator **24** allowing the dirt cup **18** to be easily removed from the housing by pulling on the dirt cup handle **50**. When a user pulls the dirt cup handle **50** while depressing the latch actuator **24**, the upper portion of the dirt cup **18** rotates away from the housing **16**, whereby the dirt cup **18** may then be lifted by the handle **50** and taken for cleaning. Such cleaning entails the removal of dirt from the dirt cup **18** by lifting the filter assembly **90** via the filter handle **102**. This also allows

a cleaning of the filter medium **94** or replacement of the filter assembly **90** or the filter medium **94**.

The downward slope of the support seal **122** between the housing conduit **48** and the dirt cup inlet duct **66**, combined with an accompanying contour on the bottom of the front wall **60** of the dirt cup **18**, encourages easy rotation of the dirt cup **18** away from the housing **16**. The result is a dirt cup **18** that is easier to remove for cleaning, creating less effort by the user and considerably less mess.

The improved releasable engagement of the bottom support **104** (referring back to FIG. 5) of the filter assembly **90** with the filter support tube **106** of the dirt cup **18** allows the filter assembly **90** to be smoothly and easily removed from the dirt cup **18**, reducing the amount of dirt and dust released during removal of the filter **90**.

With reference again to FIG. 7, the conversion port **67** may be defined in the front wall **60** or the rear wall **80** of the dirt cup **18**. In FIG. 9, it is shown as being defined in the front wall **60**. More particularly, the conversion port **67** is located in an upper portion of the inlet duct **66**. The conversion port **67** includes walls **154** which define a conversion port orifice **156**. A door **158** covers and substantially seals the conversion port orifice **156** when the vacuum **10** is in a floor cleaning mode. In a closed position (referring back to FIG. 4), dirt-laden air is drawn up the inlet duct **66** through the conversion port **67** and into the dirt cup cavity **84**. The door **158** can be spring-biased to remain in a closed, floor cleaning position. When a user desires to perform above-the-floor cleaning, the door **158** is pivoted about a hinge **160** into an open position, as shown in FIG. 9.

With reference to FIG. 10, an above-the-floor cleaning hose **162** is shown. The hose **162** comprises a first end **164** and a second end **166**. The first end **164**

terminates in a conversion adapter **168** and the second end connects to a suitable known tool. Illustrated is a crevice tool **170**. This may be an integral part of the hose **162** or a separate tool that slips onto the second end **166** of the hose **162**, as known in the art.

The conversion adapter **168** includes a distal end **172** that extends through the conversion port orifice **156** (referring back to FIG. 9) and is in fluid communication with the dirt cup cavity **84** (referring back to FIG. 6) when the vacuum cleaner **10** is in an above-the-floor cleaning mode. Proximate the distal end **172** is an inserted portion **174** that terminates at a shoulder **176**. The inserted portion **174** is of a length of sufficient to allow the distal end **172** to extend through the conversion port orifice, across the inlet duct **66** of the dirt cup **18** to the dirt cup cavity **84**. Because the deflector **133** is located on the front wall **60** of the dirt cup **18** at a point where the inlet duct **66** opens into the dirt cup cavity **84**, the distal end **172** of the adapter **168** may be proximate the deflector **133** to provide fluid communication to the dirt cup cavity **84**.

The exterior size and shape of the inserted portion **174** are of dimensions which approximate the circumference of the conversion port orifice **156** and the inner dimension of the inlet duct **66**. This allows the adapter **168** to be inserted in the conversion port orifice **156** easily, while maintaining a snug fit, and to effectively block the duct **66** so that the suction created by the fan **126** is substantially diverted to the hose **162** rather than the floor nozzle **12**. The shoulder **176** has a circumference greater than that of the conversion port orifice **156**, which provides a positive mechanical stop for the adapter **168** when it is inserted into the orifice **156**.

With reference to FIG. 11, the snug fit of the adapter **168** in the conversion

port orifice **156** can be seen. In this position, the distal end of the adapter **172** is in fluid communication with the dirt cup cavity **84**. This arrangement facilitates an easy transfer from the floor cleaning mode to the above-the-floor cleaning mode and back to the floor cleaning mode.

Turning now to FIG. 12, the nozzle **12** has pivotable sides that allow the vacuum cleaner **10** to operate in corners and confined areas. The nozzle **12** includes a central housing or first section which comprises a top cover **180** connected to a base plate **182**. The top cover **180** and the base plate **182** of the central housing retain a left nozzle head or second section, comprised of an upper plate **184** and a lower plate **186**, and a right nozzle head or third section, comprised of an upper plate **188** and a lower plate **190**. The left nozzle head lower plate **186** includes the suction inlet **40** and a central dirt path base **192**. The left nozzle upper plate **184** includes walls **193** that define a channel **194** which conveys dirt-laden air to a dirt path ring **196** which defines a central dirt path **197**.

The right nozzle lower plate **190** includes the suction inlet **40** and a dirt path ring **198** defining an orifice for the central dirt path **197**. The right nozzle upper plate includes walls **199** that define a channel **200** which conveys dirt-laden air to a dirt path ring **202** which defines an orifice for the central dirt path **197**.

A dirt path bottom cover **204** includes a distal end **206** which defines an orifice for the central dirt path **197**. In an assembled state, the left nozzle lower **186** and upper **184** plates convey the dirt-laden air from the suction inlet **40** along the channel **194** to the central dirt path **197** formed by the central dirt path base **192** and the ring **196**. The right nozzle lower plate **190** and the right nozzle upper plate **188** convey dirt-laden air from the suction inlet **40** along the channel **200** to the central dirt path

197 formed by the central dirt path rings **198**, **200**. Thus, dirt-laden air is drawn in through separate nozzle heads and conveyed to a central dirt path **197**. The dirt-laden air is then drawn through the orifice in the distal end **206** of the dirt path bottom cover **204** and into a channel formed between the dirt path bottom cover **204** and the top cover **180**.

The top cover **180** includes an access cover **208** to allow cleaning of the dirt path bottom cover **204** and the channel formed therebetween. A retaining ring **209** facilitates the connection of the dirt path bottom cover **204** and the top cover **180** to the pivot tube **44** which conveys dirt-laden air to the housing.

The left nozzle upper **184** and lower **186** plates and the right nozzle upper **188** and lower **190** plates are secured and aligned between the top cover **180** and the base plate **182**. Assisting in the alignment is the dirt path bottom cover **204**, which is secured between the top cover **180** and the base plate **182**. The base plate **182** includes a distal end **210** which aligns vertically and cooperates with the distal end **206** of the dirt path bottom cover **204**. The central dirt path base **192**, the dirt path ring **196** of the left nozzle upper plate **184**, the dirt path ring **198** of the right nozzle lower plate **190** and the dirt path ring **202** of the right nozzle upper plate **188** seat vertically upon one another from the distal end **210** of the base plate **182** to the distal end **206** of the dirt path bottom cover **204**.

A pin, fastener, projection or other similar means is connected to the distal end **210** of the base plate **182** and passes through an orifice **211** defined in the center of the central dirt path base portion **192** of the left nozzle lower plate **186**. The central dirt path base **192** and rings **196**, **198** and **200** include flanges, lips or similar features to allow them to engage one another yet still rotate. A bushing **212**

aligns and secures the uppermost central dirt path ring **202** to the distal end **206** of the dirt path bottom cover **204**. To keep constant force on the central dirt path base **192** and rings **196**, **198** and **200** in order to maintain alignment, fasteners **214** or other suitable means known in the art, such as snap-fit, welding or other mechanical means are used to connect the top plate **180** to the base plate **182** and secure the dirt path bottom cover **204** therebetween. This in turn centrally secures the left nozzle head **184, 186** and the right nozzle head **188, 190**.

The pin that passes through the orifice **211** defined in the central dirt path base **192** and the bushing **212** provides an axis around which the left nozzle **184**, **186** and the right nozzle **188, 190** pivot. In addition, smooth surfaces on the dirt path ring **196** of the left nozzle upper plate **186** and on the dirt path ring **198** of the right nozzle lower plate **190** allow the left and right nozzles to independently pivot. The rotation can be centered about a vertical pivot axis which passes through the central housing. In the illustrated embodiment, the rotation occurs when the floor nozzle **12** contacts a wall or large object. The left and right nozzles are biased into an extended position by a biasing member, for example, arms **216** of a spring **217** which cooperate with a retainer plate **218**. A left guide post **220** and a right guide post (not visible) are provided for alignment and limitation of the nozzles during rotation.

With reference to FIG. 13, a slot **222** having a first end **224** and a second end **226** is defined in the left nozzle lower plate **186**. A slot **228** having a first end **230** and a second end **232** is defined in the right nozzle lower plate **190**. The guide posts **220** (referring back to FIG. 12) engage slots **222** and **224** to provide alignment and a limit of rotation for each nozzle head when pivoting.

The left nozzle **184**, **186** reaches its extended position when the left guide post **220** contacts the wall of the first end **224** of the slot **222**. The left nozzle **184**, **186** reaches its retracted position when the left guide post **220** contacts the wall of the second end **226** of the slot **222**. The right nozzle **188**, **190** reaches its extended position when the right guide post contacts the wall of the first end **230** of the slot **228**. The right nozzle reaches its retracted position when the right guide post contacts the wall of the second end **232** of the slot **228**.

When both the left nozzle **184, 186** and the right nozzle **188, 190** are in the extended position, as shown, a front mating face **234** of the left nozzle **184, 186** and a front mating face **236** of the right nozzle **188, 190** are proximate and parallel to one another. The left nozzle **184, 186** includes a leading edge **238** and the right nozzle **188, 190** includes a leading edge **240**. The leading edges **238** and **240** are linearly aligned when both the left nozzle **184, 186** and the right nozzle **188, 190** are in an extended position. Each of the left and right nozzles includes a distal edge **242** and **244**, respectively.

Because of the bias urging the left and right nozzles in their extended positions, a user may maximize the area to be cleaned. However, when a large object or wall(s) is (are) encountered, one or both of the nozzle heads **184, 186** and **188, 190** may be caused to rotate by a leading edge **238** and **240** or distal edge **242** and **244** contacting the object or wall(s). The nozzle **12** and the object or wall is protected by the bumper **36**.

Turning now to FIG. 14, the nozzle halves are shown in a fully retracted position. This position may be encountered when a user is cleaning in a corner. In this position, the spring arms **216** are brought close to one another.

The left nozzle head **184, 186** and the right nozzle head **188, 190** may pivot independently, or, they may be linked together to pivot simultaneously. The nozzles may pivot from the extended position to the fully retracted position or any point in between. As described above, the guide posts **220** (referring back to FIG. 12) cooperate with the slots **222** and **228** to maintain alignment of the nozzles during rotation and to provide limits of rotation. When both the left nozzle **184, 186** and the right nozzle **188, 190** are fully retracted at the same time, a rear mating face **246** of the left nozzle **184, 186** and a rear mating face **248** of the right nozzle **188, 190** are proximate and generally parallel, while the front mating faces **234** and **236** are approximately normal to one another.

With the split head configuration of the nozzle **12**, hard-to-reach areas can easily be cleaned. In addition, when the floor nozzle **12** is no longer in contact with a large object or wall(s), the spring bias causes the left nozzle **184, 186** and the right nozzle **188, 190** nozzle to return to the extended position.

Although the nozzle **12** has been described with reference to a stick vacuum, it may be used on any type of vacuum cleaner, such as an upright cleaner, a canister vacuum cleaner and a hand-held cleaner that employs a wide nozzle. In addition, the exemplary embodiment has been illustrated as including left and right nozzle heads, i.e., two nozzle heads that pivot about a vertical axis. Other embodiments are anticipated by the present invention, such as a central housing with one nozzle that pivots about a vertical axis or a nozzle having three or more parts that pivot about a vertical axis.

The invention has been described with reference to a preferred embodiment. Obviously, modifications and alterations will occur to others upon reading and

understanding the preceding detailed description. It is intended that the invention be construed as including all such modifications and alterations insofar as they come within the scope of the appended claims or the equivalents thereof.